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ENG 2009G-003: Literature and Human Values: Labor, Class, and Power

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English 2009—Fall, 2001
Labor, Class, and Power:
Literary and Cinematic Constructions of “The” American Dream

Instructor: Tim Engles

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Office hours (Coleman 3831): MWF, 11:00 to 12:00, and by appointment

Course listserv: e2009fall@eiu.edu

Course Description:

Our subject matter will primarily be the world of work, and how American literary and cinematic artists have portrayed this world. We will question whether America really is a meritocracy, as promised by “the American Dream,” and whether there really is just one American Dream. We will discover some of the insights that American authors and film directors can provide into the struggles, dreams, and achievements of working life, for members of several socioeconomic classes. We will also spend time building a historical grounding for a more informed understanding of the class-based social structures and ideologies that inform, and are informed by, literary and cinematic works. You will need to approach this course and its material with an open mind and a willingness to seriously consider viewpoints expressed from different perspectives. You will also need to consider literature and film as both shaping and reflecting forces of individual and societal values.

Required Texts:

Paul Lauter, Ann Fitzgerald, *Literature, Class, and Culture: An Anthology*

Horatio Alger, Jr., *Ragged Dick*

bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters*

Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills*

Carolyn Chute, *The Beans of Egypt, Maine* (the finished edition)

Cinematic Texts (not required from Textbook Rental Services, nor for purchase; students will watch these films outside of class):

The Breakfast Club

The Boiler Room

Fast Food Women

Down and Out in America

The Big One

Bulworth

Objectives:

- To encourage reflection and understanding of how labor, class, and power exist in American life, and how literary and cinematic artists portray such phenomena;
- To encourage consideration of how such factors intersect with others, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and religious preference;
- To promote independent, critical thinking in discussion and writing;
- To practice articulating one's thought-out responses to the issues raised by the course;
- To promote the use of reasoning, passion, and evidence to support ideas and interpretations;
- To foster professional, well-organized writing.

Policies and Procedures:

Grades: Your final course grade will be determined in the following way:

Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	15%
Final exam	25%
Position papers	15%
Major essay (5-7 pages)	20%
Participation/quizzes/attendance	10%

Regarding Writing: Every two or three weeks, students will turn in a two-page, double-spaced, typed **position paper** in response to writing suggestions. These papers will be graded on how thoughtful, complete, and insightful they are. While the quality of the writing in the position papers need not be quite as polished as that in the major essay, writing that has enough errors and problems in it to distract from the content will be downgraded accordingly. **All** writing assignments are to be turned in at the beginning of the class period on the day they are due. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points (15%) each day they are late.

When the **major essay** is turned in, it **MUST** be accompanied by all notes and drafts written towards it, with the final copy of the essay on top of this material. I will use these materials to gauge and offer comments on your writing process. I WILL NOT GRADE an essay that is not accompanied by material that clearly demonstrates several earlier stages leading up to the final draft, so be sure to save all such materials (if you do most or all of your writing on a computer, print out occasional drafts to include with your final copy). Major essays unaccompanied by materials that clearly demonstrate several stages

of development toward the final copy will receive an automatic ZERO. This policy does not apply to the position papers—one typed final copy of these will suffice.

Regarding reading: Since one skill you will be developing in this class is the art of textual analysis, you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down on the bus before class, set aside enough time to read carefully—take notes as you read, then decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and bring to light. Also, to ensure that your final grade reflects your reading effort, I will occasionally give “pop” quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings.

Missed quizzes and late papers: Because the answers to unannounced quizzes come up in class after they are taken, quizzes cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes are one way to reward those who attend class regularly and on time. Again, Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. You may turn in position papers and the major essay before their due dates if you know you must miss class that day. There will be no make-up exams—students who miss the first or second exam may substitute a 6 – 8 page major essay (see requirements above) in response to questions written by me. Students who miss the final exam will receive an automatic “zero.”

E-mail activity: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it *frequently* for messages pertaining to the course. You already have an EIU account; students are also welcome to use other types of accounts. We will use our course listserv (or “e-mail discussion list”) for occasional assignments (to be announced in class) and for extension of in-class discussion. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Using e-mail is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message (cftde@eiu.edu) by Friday, August 24 at 3:00 p.m., I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. **In your message, (1) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your career aspirations, and (2) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and requirements.**

Classroom Environment: In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have the same question. Sensitive issues tend to arise within a course of this sort, so we must respect the opinions of others—it will help if we try to respond to ideas, rather than to the particular person stating them. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. (Also, please do not chew gum, eat food, or read outside materials during class, activities which are too distracting to

others--drinking beverages is okay. Finally, no caps, please, but if you must wear one, turn it backwards so we can see your eyes.)

Academic Honesty: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the English Department's policy on plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office."

ENGLISH 2009: DAILY SCHEDULE (this schedule may be subject to change)

(LCC = *Literature, Class, and Culture* CP = Instructor's Course Packet)

M AUG 20 Introduction to the course (including discussion of "class" and "the American Dream")

- Lisa Hunt, "Trashy Behavior Should Be Taken Out" (1999) (handout)

W AUG 22 bell hooks, *Class Matters* (2000), "Preface: Where We Stand" and "Introduction: Class Matters"

F AUG 24 LCC: "Introduction," 1-13

M AUG 27 LCC: "Reading for Meaning" and "Getting Ready for Class Discussion," 709-12, AND hooks, "The Me-Me Class: The Young and the Ruthless," 80-88

- Film screening: *The Breakfast Club* (directed by John Hughes, 1985, 92 minutes) (time and Coleman Hall room to be announced)
- Students who do not attend this screening **MUST** see the film on their own prior to our discussion of it on Wednesday morning.

W AUG 29 Discussion of *The Breakfast Club*

- Come to class prepared to offer at least one insightful comment or thought-provoking question about how matters of "class" are portrayed in this film

F AUG 31 CP: Howard Zinn, "Persons of Mean and Vile Condition" (from *A People's History of the United States*, 1980)

M SEP 3 LABOR DAY (what a coincidence!) NO CLASS

W SEP 5 LCC: “Between the Workers and the Owners: Class Conflict,” and Rebecca Harding Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills” (1861), 469-81

F SEP 7 LCC: “Life in the Iron Mills,” 469-94

M SEP 10 Horatio Alger, Jr. *Ragged Dick, Or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks* (1868) Preface and first nine chapters

W SEP 12 *Ragged Dick*, Chapters 10-14

F SEP 14 *Ragged Dick*, Chapters 16-20

M SEP 17 *Ragged Dick*, Chapters 21-Conclusion

W SEP 19 Alan Trachtenburg, Introduction to *Ragged Dick*

F SEP 21 24 preparation session for **Exam One**

M SEP 24 LCC: **Exam One** (in class)

W SEP 26 hooks, “Being Rich,” 70-79 AND LCC: Andrew Carnegie, from *The Gospel of Wealth* (1900), 494-500

F SEP 28 LCC: Richard Todd, “Who Me, Rich?” 441-54

M OCT 1 LCC: F. Scott Fitzgerald, “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” (1922), 632-57

- Set aside enough time to finish reading this story—it’s fairly long!!
- Film screening: *The Boiler Room* (directed by Ben Younger, 2000; 118 minutes) (Time and place TBA)
- Students who do not attend this screening **MUST** see the film on their own prior to our discussion of it on Monday morning.

W OCT 3 Discussion of *The Boiler Room*

- for Monday—go to the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), read five or six reviews of the film, print out two, and explain in a position paper how these two critics write about issues of class in this film, and how they could have done so (that is, anything you think they missed on this issue)

F OCT 5 FALL BREAK– NO CLASSES

M OCT 8 CP—Katherine Mieszkowski, “The Age of Overwork” (from *Salon.com*, 2001)

- Mid-term: last day to drop courses with no grade

W OCT 10 hooks, "Feminism and Class Power"

- In-class film screening: *Fast-food Women* (directed by Anne Lewis Johnson, 1991, 29 minutes)

F OCT 12 hooks, "White Poverty: The Politics of Invisibility"

- In-class film screening: *Down and Out in America* (directed by Lee Grant, 1986)

M OCT 15 Continue discussion of hooks' essay and Grant's film

W OCT 17 Carolyn Chute, *The Beans of Egypt, Maine* (the finished version; 1985; 1995)

F OCT 19 *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*

M OCT 22 *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*

W OCT 24 *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*

F OCT 26 *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*

M OCT 29 **Exam Two**

- Film-screening: *The Big One* (1997, directed by Michael Moore, 108 minutes) (Time and place TBA)
- Students who do not attend this screening **MUST** see the film on their own prior to our discussion of it on Monday morning.

W OCT 31 Discussion of *The Big One*

F NOV 2 Writing Workshop

- Before class, read LCC: "What Is Good Writing?" 708-09, and "The Elements of a Successful Essay" and subsequent sections, 718-33

M NOV 5 hooks, "Class and Race: The New Black Elite"

W NOV 14 *Linden Hills*

F NOV 16 *Linden Hills*

M NOV 19 to F NOV 23 THANKSGIVING RECESS

M NOV 26 *Linden Hills*

- **Formal essay due at the beginning of class**

W NOV 28 *Linden Hills*

- hooks, "Class Claims: Real Estate and Racism"

F NOV 30 *Linden Hills*

- Film-screening: *Bulworth* (1998, directed by Warren Beatty, 108 minutes) (Time and place TBA)
- Students who do not attend this screening **MUST** see the film on their own prior to our discussion of it on Monday morning.

M DEC 3 Discussion of *Bulworth*

W DEC 5 Discussion of *Bulworth*

- hooks, "Class and the Politics of Living Simply"

F DEC 7 hooks, ""Crossing Class Boundaries" and "Living without Class Hierarchy"

- Review for final exam
- Tearful, heartfelt farewells

Final Exam: Time and location to be announced